Emily Sol

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AP English Language

1. Confessing to a crime you didn’t commit in order to avoid punishment is wise.

Now, the simple more innate answer to this question would be “Well this is stupid of course not, why the hell would I confess to something I didn’t even do? if I’m truly innocent I won’t be in any trouble” However, there’s a more obvious, although selfish response the “Hell yeah if I’m not getting punished, and I’m leaving squeaky clean with no chances of suffering consequences then why not?” this comes from our deep rooted animalistic instincts to protect ourselves, and our “cubs” so to speak, the “every man for himself” good old American spirit. After all, why should an innocent person not only commit to something they didn’t do but pay the price for it as well? Because let’s face it, if you’re lying about committing a crime it doesn’t take a poorly written detective film to figure out you didn’t commit it, just some basic forensics and elbow grease. Looking at this question the natural response is to say no, the good in us wants to say no, but we do know questions (or well thought out questions at least), cannot be a simple yes or no answer, they require something more. Like ham is paired with cheese, any psychologically mind boggling question that puts our morals at stake is best paired with situational ethics. In order to fully respond to this question, one must know the circumstances. How bad is the crime I’d be committing to? Because let’s face it god knows you can’t just commit to any old crime, god no, you have morals for Christ’s sake. So let’s think back for a moment, using our imagination and situational ethics, back to 1692 a time of devil worshippers and incantations, a time where witches were believed to be walking among the living. At the time we must understand that religious fervor was high, and the average person blamed everyday calamities on supernatural beings; if a child died at birth it was Satan, if the crops died the underworld was sending them a message. Now because of so many religious superstitions over time it was common belief that there were witches who were casting spells on people. At the time this was considered to be one of the most heinous crimes a person could commit, if you were found guilty of such a thing chances are you’d either be sentenced to death or burnt at the stake, and if you somehow lived then let’s not mention a lifetime of public isolation. Now, that was unless you could provide people with more detailed information on how you came to be a witch. If you could prove to the police that someone else put you up to it (which at the time it was just a basic he said she said) and they cast a spell on you then that’s it you were free, almost as if nothing happened. Of course there were no real witches at the time but if you have a group of people telling you you’ve caused someone to be deathly sick and they can’t even stand the sight of you without fainting. Then your mind begins to play games on you and you start to really think you’re a witch or something of the kind nonetheless. In 1692 when people were as ignorant as a Mormon republican convention, I do somewhat to an extent believe this was the best choice to make, not the wisest but if you wanted to survive then it was the best. The wiser choice to me in any situation would be to say you didn’t commit the crime, because if you didn’t commit it at all then there would be no punishment? But unfortunately, the fact is detective work was not at its peak so in order to gather evidence you had to do so from word of mouth, which

2. The difference between right and wrong is clear.

I guess the simple and easy way out to this question would be to give you a brief 2 paragraph ramble on how “everyone is different”, “we’re all unique” it “depends on our beliefs”. The truth of the matter is I think deep down people know what’s right and what’s wrong. Of course what’s right to me may not be right to you that’s a given, but the question at hand isn’t asking me to evaluate what act is right and what act is wrong, it’s asking if I know a clear determination between the two. In my humble opinion we do know what’s right, when we hold the door open for someone we know it’s the right thing to do, and when someone doesn’t say thank you we get agitated, but why? Because we know its common courtesy and we want to be rewarded for good deeds. When you’re 5 years old and you break your mother’s favorite vase your natural instinct is to hide it, or deny it ever happened, and why? Because we know our mother’s going to give us a backhand across the face. We deep down inside know that it’s wrong and we should have been more careful. I think our natural instincts as human is to make things more complex than they seem, when sometimes 2+2 really does equal 4. Deep down inside us we know it’s wrong to do something, however we may be jaded by other outside factors that deter us from determining that. A classic example would be Jean Valjean from Victor Hugo’s *Les Miserables*, in the book Jean Valjean steals a loaf of bread in order to support his family and ends up thrown in jail. Although in the book Jean Valjean states that he doesn’t believe what he did was wrong and he shouldn’t have been thrown in jail, deep down his character knows it wasn’t right or else he wouldn’t have tried to hide from the police, however due to the fact that there was a famine at the time and he had no other means of supporting or feeding his family it led him to committing the crime. Notice how Jean Valjean didn’t send his wife or children to do it and why not? He said there was nothing wrong with it, but deep down he knows that if his family were to get caught it’d be dangerous because it’s wrong. Don’t get me wrong you have to do what you have to do, but lying to yourself to consolidate your feelings by making yourself seem like your moral compass is on the right track by blaming outside factors doesn’t help. The act itself is still wrong, no matter what it is or who you are, when you’re little your cultural and societal surroundings teach you what’s wrong so that you know, it prepares you for the real world, it’s not as if you’ve been locked in a cage and left to learn life lessons by yourself. It’s easier for us to tell ourselves we don’t know something is wrong, because it allows us to commit it with much less of a chip on our shoulders. Let’s put it this way if it was right to do you wouldn’t have a second thought, you wouldn’t feel the need to hide it from other people, and you wouldn’t have to be asking yourself the very question.

3. It is better to die for what you believe in rather than to lie and save your life.

As great as the concept of dying for a cause seems, it really all depends on what exactly you believe in, this question is rather ambiguous because who really determines what is “better”? Is it god? And who exactly is this question aimed at me as a person, or society in general? Personally, as courageous and heroic as the concept seems I probably wouldn’t die for what I believe in, as selfish as it may be mainly because, I’m growing up in a generation and location where everything is handed to me and we really don’t believe in anything besides good skin and healthy hair follicles. If I was living in Saudi Arabia where women’s rights are put to the test every day, or in South Korea where they have overruling dictators then the situation might be different. But the fact of the matter is when I really sit and think I have no beliefs that I would die for and part of this is due to the Westernized culture I live in, America is scientifically proven to be an individualistic country; where people rely on personal success rather than on group success to maintain happiness. However, even if I did have strong beliefs I still wouldn’t die for them partly because dying for a cause solves absolutely nothing. I mean when did the concept of being a martyr suddenly become part of a job description? You don’t have to reenact some cheesy patriotic independence movie to showcase what you strongly believe in. Now some may read this and say “Wow how can you just lie to save yourself, that’s outrageous.” The fact is humans lie everyday it’s in our nature whether we tell our wife she looks really good in that pair of jeans, or when you were a kid and told your mom you didn’t go to that party she said you couldn’t go to. Were genetically programmed to tell white lies no matter how hard we try, and if we have the chance to either die for a cause or save our families, as sweet and endearing the thought may seem almost all people would chose to live. Because we believe were invincible, sooner or later we know we’re going to die, but knowing you can prolong it or control it makes us feel powerful. This leads back to Westernized views, where everyman is for himself, and it’s the good thing to do to save your family (or use them as an excuse).

4. There is only one correct way to interpret the Bible.

Depending on how you interpret and perceive this question, the answer varies. If you look at it conservatively and think back historically to when it was originally written then yes, there really is only one correct way to interpret the Bible because I’m sure a group of Hawthorne’s didn’t gather around a table eluding one thing to another. However, if you look at the question in a more modernized sense then you’d say there is not, because people are different and views vary depending on our beliefs and morals. The differing ways that one interprets this question shows that life is all about perception, let’s say if I read Nathaniel Hawthorne’s The Scarlet Letter. Now I may sit there throughout the book and realize wow religion is actually really dumb and condemning a woman to a life of shame over one action is not only incomprehensible but immoral. However someone else reading the book might look at it and realize how moral values have deteriorated and if Hester was in a more modern environment her actions would have been praised. Both of these interpretations of the novels are subject to the person and perception, none of these are right or wrong however the book itself was written with an essential message and that cannot be taken away from it. The fact is there is one way to interpret things especially the Bible, but I think nobody has quite found the exact way it was meant to be interpreted yet, which has led to so many denominations of one simple religion. If we think back to the 19th century when Andrew Jackson was President the bible was used as the basis for “Manifest Destiny”; an absurd theory where people believed that it was their divine destiny under god to redeem their land and create the image of “America”. In order to do so Americans kicked thousands of Native Indians or “heathens” out of their home land, so that to recreate their “city upon a hill”. At the time using the bible as an excuse to kill, relocate and destroy Indians lives under the Indian Removal Act of 1830 seemed like the right thing to do under the divinity of god. When we look back at it now I hope people come to realize that these actions are wrong. Andrew Jackson and the followers of Manifest Destiny interpreted gods teachings in a way that justified murder and immoral behavior, however nowhere is it clearly stated that the genocide of a subhuman race is acceptable under terms of acquiring land. The act was done under influences of different perceptions of who god was as a person, nobody has ever met god, and nobody has directly spoken to him. But the way these people interpreted the bible allowed them to believe that if god were alive at the time he would have said “hey yeah that’s fine go right ahead”. As morally close to god as people may feel in my opinion I think people like to use the good old god argument to justify the most immoral actions known to man. With this being said I think that there is a correct way to interpret the Bible but what I define as morally correct, someone who believes in mass genocide of a certain race might find correct as well. No one knows the actual correct way to interpret the Bible, and at the pace the human race is going it’ll take us years before we can emotionally evolve in a species that’ll be able to correctly interpret it.

5. That which doesn’t destroy us only makes us stronger.

Although this is a very powerful statement that is connected to hope, strength and determination I don’t necessarily agree with it. The reason is that although I do believe that there are some very strong willed people out there who are able to make the best out of bad situations, not everyone has the same amount of determination. Just because I’m not utterly destroyed by an experience doesn’t mean we can go to the other side of the spectrum and say I was made into this powerful femme fatale. There are experiences that even though they don’t bring our life into complete shambles, manage to slowly eat away at us subconsciously. There’s always that one person in our lives that if you look at what they’ve gone through in life it becomes incomprehensible to us that they’re even able to wake up in the morning, you want to grab them by the hand and erase them of all the terrible things they’ve been through, but somehow they seem more emotionally put together then you. Looking at things from an outside perspective allows people to conjure up this thought and become infinitely envious of the person who’s able to stay emotionally put together. We’re all composed of intricate layers, and the person who on the outside seems strong, once you begin to strip each layer one by one you start to see the heartache, the pain, the tears and the core of what has really made someone who they are. The thought what doesn’t kill us makes us stronger is a complete allusion to me. I think the statement itself holds more meaning than the experience. If you have a family member who just died, but your friend is over your shoulder telling you this is the earth’s way of telling you something, and that it was meant to build you into a stronger person. Then after a while you stop wallowing in your own self pity and begin to put your big boy pants on. The more and more you tell yourself you’re stronger the more you start to believe yourself. And as time passes each layer becomes less noticeable. This doesn’t mean the action that didn’t destroy you made you stronger it means you’ve become cleverer at playing dress up.

6. It’s more difficult to forgive yourself if the person you have hurt doesn’t forgive you.

I’ve contemplated this question for quite some time thinking as to whether or not it really is more difficult to forgive yourself if other people don’t. I think it all depends on how you carry yourself and how highly you think of yourself. It seems more selfish for someone to say they don’t care about the people they hurt, as long as they forgive themselves, but is it really selfish? Why is it hard for people to see others who are genuinely happy with themselves and their decisions? Because we tell ourselves when we’re little that we have to be selfless, we have to be aware of other people’s emotions so that we don’t hurt them. The key to forgiving yourself is realizing your self-worth, and knowing who you are as a person. If you’re generally happy with who you are, and realize not everyone is perfect it becomes easier for you to forgive yourself when you make mistakes. This is because you realize that the average person makes mistakes in their daily lives, but for some reason when mistakes involve other people and the ones we love it becomes more difficult to forgive ourselves. Why is that? When we love people, and hold them in a high regard, to see them crumble and cry because of the horrible actions that we’ve taken takes a toll on us. It becomes more difficult to forgive ourselves when theirs a second party involved, because not only have you done something to hurt yourself but you’ve managed to hurt someone else in the process. It’s as if the mask of perfection you’ve strived to hide yourself under has been taken off, and all your mistakes and imperfections have slowly come out to play with those you’ve worked so hard to hide them from. And as children we’re taught to be aware of others emotions, so to know that we’ve completely disregarded this becomes tough on our conscious. The question at hand has been explored in a variety of literature; it is exactly the premise for Edgar Allen Poe’s short story *William Wilson*. Poe afflicts a very melancholic and sorrowful tone onto the protagonist William Wilson in order to persuade his readers into feeling some ounce of remorse for his character. From the very start Wilson states to the reader that he is in fact evil, and the story is to describe the path that got him there. In general the character of William Wilson, holds himself in a very low regard and sees no good in himself what so ever which tends to be very self destructive. His feelings towards himself cause him to lead to alcoholism, cheating and his biggest regret that led him to his downfall. From the very beginning of the story the reader is meant to see no hope for William Wilson. I mean why would we? He’s sad, bitter, and basically begs the audience for forgiveness. This brings us back to our essential question of whether or not it is easier to forgive yourself if others do. William Wilson basically thinks nothing of himself and he says that he hopes the audience can find pity in him to lessen the shame of his guilt. If we analyze the overall characteristics in Wilson he at no point shows nay ambition to be a better person. As opposed to listening to his conscious and following it’s advice he wallows in self pity and blames his negative energy, poor temper, and evil sadistic ways on his genetics. Wilson could have very easily decided to hang out with a better group of people and get his act together. As opposed to doing this he wants everyone around him to forgive him instead of bettering himself as a person. Back to the main point, I think in general it’s easier for people to think lowly of themselves when we do something wrong which is a natural inborn instinct because we know the act is wrong. But when we know that our actions are forgivable by other people and they tell us its okay to be happy then we feel as if things are starting to turn up and if other people can accept who we are, then why can’t we ourselves?

7. Courage means doing something even though it can be difficult and fearsome.

If you look at the literal definition of courage, it means the ability to do something whether or not it is difficult or dangerous. Although I do believe that there is a difference between the moral basis of courage and ambition, the question at hand is asking me to evaluate what this statement means to me. To me courage is doing what other people have taught you you’re not strong enough to do. It means growing the balls to go out there and do what’s not expected of you., finally living outside of the boundaries for once in your life. Life is short, as cheesy as it may seem you’ve really only got a few good years on your hands to really explore. My philosophy is why hold yourself back from living when in 100 years, once you’ve died and long outlived your welcome, no one’s going to remember if you embarrassed yourself at Senior prom. Dwelling on small things will only set you back in life. Living within societal norms is like a fish, locked in its bowl. But humans, were blessed, we have the choice to jump out the fish bowl without completely doing a suicide dive. That’s a beautiful thing, to know that you have the freedom to do as you please. That’s what separates us from animals, being able to build up courage and break out of that fish bowl we’ve all managed to stay in. Living your life in fear will only set you back. So yes to me courage is doing something difficult, in order to do something that truly frightens you it wouldn’t take a coward. It takes someone who’s able to look back and evaluate the negative outcome of their actions, and realize that whatever will come finally isn’t going to hold us back anymore. Realizing that our fears can no longer strap us down like a seatbelt.

9. Beliefs in opposition to common values should be illegal.

I would have to respectfully disagree with this statement. By outlawing the opinions of others you’re creating a uniform monotonized nation, where free thoughts and ideas are discouraged. Why should the thoughts of others be compromised because of your beliefs? By stopping the free flow of thought you’re not only creating a communist nation, but spreading ignorant beliefs. When people grow up with this as the core of their moral background it creates nothing but chaos. However although the argument that “people are entitled to their own opinion” arises, a clear line must be drawn. Even though people are indeed entitled to their own opinions, some opinions are absolute shit. Theirs people who believe abortions should be illegal even if the woman has been raped, theirs men who think they can dictate the rights of what a woman can do with their body. Even though these are opinions, it ends there; it doesn’t make the persons opinion morally correct in any way, shape or form. With that said it doesn’t men their opinions should be outlawed. By allowing people to share thoughts, it lets people grow from out of their ignorance and see the point of views of others. This leads to more tolerance. Let’s take Martin Luther King Jr. as an example, his entire life the equality of blacks and whites seemed to be something that was out of his reach. Once Martin Luther King made his speech, ideas began to change, and the barriers that caused friction between blacks and whites slowly began to break down. Of course, these changes weren’t done immediately but as years go by more people begin to speak out against injustices. The more people freely share and voice their opinions the more we begin to grow and cause a greater change.